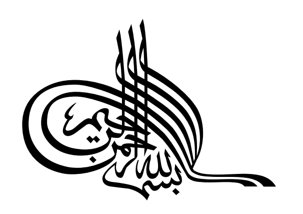
Moral Values:
The Basis of All Reform


بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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May God guide us towards the right path.

Abbes Jirari

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Throughout history, peoples have witnessed protest or revolutionary movements to claim their rights and seek opportunities of a dignified life based on justice, fairness and equality. In addition to these goals, protestors have aimed at removing such obstacles impeding the attainment of those objectives as the different forms of corruption rampant in public institutions and power structures and managing officers, and the negative consequences of their acts on citizens.

Today, the world undergoes many successive events, namely in the third world countries and particularly in the Arab and Islamic countries, events that show the extent to which the individual suffers to achieve his/her dignity, right to a decent life and all his/her other legitimate rights.

It’s self-evident that these rights affect directly various aspects of the life of individuals and groups including the political, economic, social and cultural aspects. These rights generally revolve around

freedom as a natural and inherent right of every human being, and around the idea that people cannot enjoy their lives without being able to enjoy their rights, to live in peaceful coexistence and tolerance with others, and to accept the right to difference.

This is undoubtedly an old-new issue that has attracted the attention of thinkers and humanity as a whole everywhere and all the time. This is due mainly to three reasons. First, the human being often yearns for a decent life. Second, humanity continuously witnesses scenes of oppression and persecution either between peoples or between communities of the same people as a result of class disparities, lack of social equality, and appetite for power and domination. Third, individuals and communities are plagued by mistrust within the personal and family circle and also within the broader circle of public life.

Considering the civilizational and cultural evolution taking place in our country and the progress in information and communication systems which facilitate exchange of interests; given the tragic circumstances faced by almost all Arab

countries in a regional and international situation fraught with perils and difficulties; and despite the peaceful stability we enjoy under a national and wise leadership and which we should defend and preserve without exaggerating its exceptional character, our society is facing some corrupt trends that seek to perpetuate corruption and impose it on the society as an unavoidable fate. This seriously jeopardizes the values and principles of our identity including the national belonging, the sense of citizenship and the other components of religion, language and culture.

This serious situation makes us in desperate need for a code of ethics that should be observed, adopted and implemented by both individuals and groups. On those ethics, we should educate our present and future generations so as to preserve our existence and strengthen our society within the framework of the rule of law and away from any aspects of conflict, fragmentation or disintegration.

I think that this view can be a good basis for reform for us in Morocco and for other similar countries. But this might not be favoured by those who think that comprehensive reform should be

prior to moral values which can prevail only in favourable and good conditions at all levels.

In this paper, I would like to show the importance of morals in paving the way for a wide-ranging reform. The reform here goes beyond its literal sense of rehabilitation, amendment and improvement to mean change which may not lead to revolting against the existing order and overthrowing the political system. Change rather means removing all forms and levels of corruption from its roots. In fact, it's the claim of both the individual citizen and the whole community. Man as an individual should first reform himself. To push through that reform, he needs to be well informed, oriented and educated. He also needs a good model to follow. Hence, the importance of reformers anywhere and at anytime.

«Al-Akhlaaq» is the plural form of the Arabic word «kholoq» and «kholq» meaning morals and ethics. It actually means the natural disposition of a person which shapes his/her own existence, i.e. his/her inherent moral constitution and patterns of behaviour that stem from his/her psychological condition.

Behaviour reflects the way or method every person deals with himself and with others through innate emotional drives on the one hand and through acquired manners driven by sheer personal will and commanded by reason on the other hand. While observing moral values he/she believes in and aspires to achieve, the individual is usually affected by the behaviour of the other members of society. The behaviour may be good or bad, positive or negative, and accordingly incurring reward or punishment. The expected result of this is that people will approve good behaviour and abhor the bad one. Discerning these two different paths is acquired through knowledge, education, reason and practice.

It's evident that the good refers to the fact that everything is in its state of perfection and evil reflects utter imperfection. When we talk about evil, we mean the acts the individual can avert such as sin, misdeed and vice relating to behaviour and morals.

Good and evil are two poles to which the human nature is prone. Some are prone to the first one and some others are disposed to the latter.

Some optimist intellectuals claim that life is all good. Some pessimists say the opposite. But Islam and Muslim philosophers, including al-Ashairah and al- Mu'tazilah, devoted great attention to the human psyche and gave it different meanings such as gender, man, self, truth, spirit, heart and conscience. It was also assigned the meaning of the conflicting forces of good and evil within the human psyche, or the dichotomy of the soul that dictates evil and the self-blaming soul.

While the human psyche is by nature subject to the tendencies of good and evil, religion, through the morals it preaches, is the best guide to the righteous path and the ultimate deterrent that saves people from embarking upon the course of evil. In fact, Allah created the human psyche with a predisposition to good and made it capable of discerning evil from good. Anyone who purifies, reforms and develops one's soul with obedience to Allah, virtues, and acts of goodness will prosper; and the one who stains and taints it with sins and misdeeds and who gives free rein to one's instincts and lusts will fail and lose.

Idiomatically speaking, morals mean the theoretical science shaped by practical phenomena. It is a science that studies man's behaviour and examines his acts and manners in relation to others. It studies not only the state of that behaviour, but also the way it should be depending on the will of the person himself, his education within an environment of freedom, dignity, tolerance and solidarity, while taking into account the entire knowledge and emotions emanating from the society's values, fundamentals and sanctities.

It is a science that is viewed from the perspective of a philosophy closely linked to the wisdom that considers the aspects of the human psyche, the rules that guide its driving forces, and the voluntary acts set against the involuntary ones produced arbitrarily and intuitively according to the person's natural constitution which reflects his/her manifest image.

Morals form a complete and systematic set that includes a certain number of common values shared by groups and individuals regardless of their differences, diversity and plurality. Such disparities are often due to levels of education, knowledge and

awareness, and also to the ideals each category is committed to according to its living conditions and aspirations that are reconciled through a total submission to its religious and non-religious beliefs.

Therefore, schools of ethics have emerged and become diverse depending on the prevailing philosophies at any age, and also on the monotheist religions which have greatly affected their followers' behaviour. In this respect, Islam takes on added importance considering the good moral values it preaches. Those values are essentially practical virtues set forth by the tradition of the Prophet (Peace be upon him) which will certainly be dealt with by other papers in this conference. The life of groups and individuals is founded on those values in such a way as to harmonize the human thought and Allah's commands.

Morals are closely tied to conscience, i.e. to the internal feeling experienced by the individual and to the ensuing thinking and recognition. Conscience is also related to the individual's responsibility enabling him to make choices, accept and enjoin virtues and acts of goodness on the one hand, and on the other hand to decline and criticize sinning

and wrong doing. In addition, man has a great ability to attain his rights and fulfil his duties in dignity, self-esteem and happiness without any inferiority complex as a human being. As such, the individual can realize ambitions in the present as well as in a desired future only through following a good model, matching up goals with means, and striking a balance between personal and collective needs and between the national and universal values.

We should point out that no matter how strong the influence of the exogenous material factors is, values do keep a certain degree of consistency to clearly distinguish good from evil anywhere and at anytime. Moreover, we should not forget that the scope of morals expands as that of science, especially human sciences, is getting broader, with all the influence it can have on political, economic, social and cultural orientations. Also, extension of the sphere of morals is conditioned by the impact of technology on the different aspects of life. That's why we talked about a certain degree of consistency, and not consistency in the absolute sense.

With globalization becoming an unavoidable reality, we can talk about universal moral values shared by all human beings regardless of their identities in general and faiths in particular. Nevertheless, religion remains an essential component of those moral values as it provides guidance on the path of goodness and gives exhortation to avoid the course of evil. In this respect, we should acknowledge the contribution of all religions to developing those moral values without taking into consideration the metaphysical or the practical aspects of religions, though these two are crucial in refining man's behaviour, soothing his soul, and making him confidently responsible of his acts. Religion thus enables the individual to question his acts before being accountable to law.

Within the framework of accountability, the question of moral standards, unique or double, makes their application fraught with various risks, the most notable of which is the accumulation and the protection of corruption by totalitarian regimes which encourage aberrance to preserve power even through depriving large sections of the populations

of their basic rights. In addition, conflicts and clashes triggered off by the narrow-minded and selfish attitudes towards freedom and personal interest in our society cause great damage to the individual and the society as a whole. Such deviant behaviours include cheating, violence, drug addiction and rampant bribery. This latter has become the main scourge undermining our society despitethe numerous attempts to eradicate it through preaching, deterrent laws or theoretical reform efforts.

It is well known that many calls were made to adopt and implement programmes and projects of reform, some advocating religion, others secularism, while some others are trying to reconcile the two – a mission that seems difficult if not impossible to accomplish. But all these projects face opposition and rejection on account of the confusion surrounding their notions and practices, immaturity, unconvincing discourse, ideological enmity, and practical inadequacies.

Many obstacles hinder reform and resist any reform commitment. With the harsh social conditions added to the social and economic

problems dogging some social classes, such as lack of awareness, wide-spread poverty, illiteracy and ignorance, the spread of feelings of envy, hatred and illegitimate aspirations claiming rights and neglecting duties, proponents of reform should be well-equipped to be a model for the members of their community. They should represent the powerful ideal their own people dream of and the reliable refuge for people in times of trouble as well as in time of ease.

It’s no secret that emulating models is a human natural disposition that prompts the individual to imitate firstly the people in his family and secondly his educators and teachers at school and at the university. Emulation goes far beyond those two circles to involve anything the individual aspires to that may be conceived as the perfect personality model.

Such emulated models include those people who, on account of their qualifications, occupy the top of the social pyramid, namely scholars, intellectuals, media practitioners, politicians, rulers, trade unionists, representatives of the civil society and officers managing public affairs. These leaders

should acquire some ideals to make themselves models to be followed and to push through reform.

The most important standards would-be officials should have are firm resolve and strong determination. They should also be well-informed about the different fields of their social reality, be able to pinpoint and diagnose the problems faced by people and to find effective solutions to them. Furthermore, they should be able to introduce the necessary reforms and translate slogans and ideals into practical achievements. Such reforms should address peoples' needs, not only material needs related to their livelihoods, but also spiritual and intellectual needs which may seem to some unnecessary. In this regard, intellectual and cultural efforts play a leading role in undertaking comprehensive reform. Intellectuals and scholars, if they rise up again to their responsibility, can lead reform advocates and initiators.

Therefore, those who undertake reform should have broad knowledge and open-minded and tolerant thought and be firmly attached to their national principles, territorial integrity and identity components. They should own delicate sentiments,

keen awareness and well-seated knowledge. In addition, sound opinion and clear-sightedness are needed to reconcile the requirements of originality and the novelties of modernity. Such qualifications will surely enable leaders to adequately plan and undertake reform projects through involving and convincing their people with effective and workable projects without cheating, lying, manoeuvring or conspiring. Moreover, they should accept self-criticism and the critiques of opponents with complete objectivity away from provocation, incitement, libelling or defamation – things that are widespread and damaging the positive aspects and the goals of criticism.

On the other hand, any reformer should fully grasp the affinities and differences between politics and moral values. In this way, he can be sufficiently judicious to overcome their challenges and constraints, resist their intrigues and manipulations, and fight opportunistic behaviours and all forms of corruption. He should also keep himself far off corruption and off anything that can lead to it like business which has no goal other

than making profit even through abuse of power and hindering reform.

Only those who are filled with moral values can conduct reform. Their morals bring them credibility and make them able to influence others and gain their trust. Accordingly, they can be followed and imitated. Their actions can be emulated by people who find in their actions and leadership confidence, inspiration and moral tranquillity that lead to happiness. If such cooperation and good will are achieved, good would prevail and get even stronger and wide-spread.

Such are the characteristics that stem from moral values which are and will remain the basis and the starting point of any reform.